

# SUPER Natural

A lifetime love of art and nature proved to be the catalyst behind Louise Black's delicate charcoal sketches of South African birds



“It really happened by chance,” says self-taught artist Louise Black, who co-manages a decor showroom in Johannesburg. “One of our clients was looking for a series of black and white prints for an interior design project. As I’ve always had a passion for art and wildlife, I was really keen to try my hand at drawing some for them.” The result was 16 charcoal sketches of South African birds, from masked weavers and lilac-breasted rollers to wagtails and bishops.

“To my delight the sketches sold well and I thoroughly enjoyed working in charcoal – it’s softer and more forgiving than other media. I’m experimenting with colour on some of my other projects, but people seem to respond to black and white. Art is such a personal thing and the neutral tones are more graphic, more generic.”

A great animal lover, Louise has always had a soft spot for birds. “I watch them all the time – it’s amazing how many species you’ll see in suburban gardens alone. And the birdbrain label is a total myth,” she laughs. “I hand-reared a dove and watched it raise three batches of chicks. They’re intelligent and have their changing moods, just like we do.”

Although she always wanted to study art at a tertiary level, Louise’s creative path has taken some interesting turns. She’s worked in the film industry in Cape Town, studied web design, spent eight years in the UK and managed to find

time to complete a diploma in massage therapy. “I travelled for a year before coming back to SA for good, soaking up the sights in India, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. And while I’d always wanted to pursue my interest in art, I’d never really been in one place long enough or had a routine that allowed it.”

Landing her current job at The Gatehouse at Mavromac gave Louise that routine and she signed up for night classes in drawing and foundation painting. “I paint on weekends and am experimenting with landscapes and still lifes. By nature it’s a very solitary pastime, but fortunately my husband Charles, who’s an architect, understands that. My time in the showroom is very busy and client-oriented, so painting is almost like a meditation. I’m completely focused on one thing for three or four hours and it’s both peaceful and challenging.”

Looking to the future, Louise remains fascinated by travel and hopes to return to India. “I’d also like to explore Peru, Chile, Argentina and Italy. On the creative side I’d love to learn to paint properly, to really develop an accuracy with it. My dream would be to learn the skills of the old masters – to play with the pigments, prime the canvases and really take your time.”

Subject-wise, Louise plans to include larger birds such as raptors in her repertoire. “I enjoy the process of working through each sketch and it’s been an enormously satisfying journey.” **GH**



#### SOURCE

Louise Black, The Gatehouse at Mavromac 011 444 1584